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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6664
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0587
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4118
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7677
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5236
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1216
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1118
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0079
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3336
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1019
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001009

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS; INR/EAP; S/ES-O/CMS
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/10/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM BM

SUBJECT: BURMA: ACTIVISTS BEGIN TO TENTATIVELY REGROUP

REF: RANGOON 996 AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. A veteran political activist told Poloff that a handful of pro-democracy activists have tried to reorganize in Burma since the crackdown but are still unwilling to stage protests or other public demonstrations due to fear of immediate regime reprisals. GOB raids against monasteries continue, as do arrests of anyone suspected of harboring pro-democracy sentiments. Internet connectivity with the outside world appears to have been reestablished sporadically, at least for the time being. Life on the streets of Rangoon looks closer to normal but our sources tell us a strong undercurrent of fear and anger remains. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Veteran pro-democracy activist and former Aung San Suu Kyi bodyguard Myat San reported that approximately a dozen pro-democracy activists met on September 26 to create a new political action group called the "All People's Alliance." Myat San said the purpose of the organization is to advocate for UN-brokered dialogue between the regime and pro-democracy leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi. Myat San reported members are reluctant to consider any public protests, demonstrations, or labor strikes right now out of fear of swift retribution and arrest. So far, the All People's Alliance has held three meetings and sent the Embassy photographs of the shooting of Japanese journalist Nagai and a statement of condolence to be passed to his family, which e relayed to the Japanese Embassy on October 3. They have not yet issued any statements on the government's offer to talk with Aung San Suu Kyi or Gambari's visit, and have yet to publicly condemn the crackdown.

¶3. (C) According to Myat San, the group's inaugural meeting was attended by politically-active students, labor leaders, artists, 88 Generation Students members, and sympathetic

civil servants, including one immigration officer. He reported that each of the attendees claimed to represent others of similar backgrounds but said the representatives were reluctant to reveal exactly who, or how many others they represented, citing security concerns. Two subsequent meetings were not as well-attended and members have had significant difficulty communicating with one another in the interim.

¶4. (C) Speaking about the immigration officer who attended, Myat San told us several immigration officers went to school with a number of political activists and are sympathetic to the opposition as a result. He informed us a contact of his inside Rangoon's Ministry of Immigration said that beginning on October 9, the Ministry's remaining offices in Rangoon were being relocated to Nay Pyi Taw. Myat San relayed speculation the move was prompted by fears that local immigration employees had witnessed much of the regime crackdown from their downtown offices, adjacent to Sule Pagoda and City Hall. On October 9, Poloff observed several army trucks loaded with furniture near the immigration offices, but can not otherwise independently confirm they were moving staff to Nay Pyi Taw.

¶5. (C) Myat San told us that activists began talking about forming the All People's Alliance before the crackdown, because they believed the monk-led demonstrations could only do so much without a political organization to support them. He pointed out that, at the time, most opposition leaders, including Min Ko Naing, had already been arrested or were on the run, so there was an increasing need for others to step up. The latest crackdown, however, has had a chilling effect on these activists' resolve, making the prospect of them organizing further demonstrations any time soon more remote, according to Myat San. Nonetheless, he assured us that the

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All People's Alliance would work to build support for meaningful dialogue and would provide us with evidence they have of abuses committed during this latest crackdown.

¶6. (C) Myat San said great fear of arrest, torture and death at the hands of the regime persists. While he and his colleagues do not know exactly how many people were killed or detained in the past few weeks, they estimate that security forces in Rangoon killed approximately 30 persons while actually breaking up the protests. He noted stories of hundreds of other arrests and deaths persist, and he could not rule out the possibility that many more died as a result of torture or neglect while detained.

¶7. (C) Myat San informed us of another raid yesterday on Rangoon's Maggan Monastery, the site of HIV activist Phyut Thin's clinic. According to witnesses, at 0200 on October 9, authorities arrested four monks and six novices at Maggan and forced its 15 resident HIV patients to move to Wai Bar Ge Specialist Hospital in Rangoon. Sources reported the six novices and two of the monks were later released on the condition they not return to the monastery. The whereabouts or condition of the other two monks is not known. Myat San pointed out this monastery was first one raided on September ¶28. At the time over 50 monks and novices resided there. Now, according to witnesses, there are none.

¶8. (C) Myat San confirmed student activists Ko Kyaw Ko Ko, Ko Sithu Maung, and Ma Han Ni Oo were arrested by authorities on October 9. The three are members of the All Burmese Federation of Students, Union, which they recently re-established. A fourth unidentified activist reportedly escaped arrest. Embassy sources also report police arrested pro-democracy supporter Daw Myint Myint Kyi for sheltering student activist Ma Nan Sow in her home. Witnesses reported Nan Sow was not in the house at the time and remains free.

¶9. (C) Embassy sources and employees report that internet connectivity with the outside world has been reestablished,

at least for now. Members of our travel section and other Embassy contacts told us that beginning on October 9, they were able to e-mail and conduct business with their counterparts overseas. The Traders Hotel also confirmed that their internet connection has worked for the past two days, allowing them to process credit card payments overseas once again (although not many; we have heard they have almost no paying guests this week). Prior to October 9, some emails sent to other addressees within the country got through after long delays, but no one could use the web to contact the outside world, except for a few brief periods when connectivity was re-established in the dead of night.

¶10. (C) Comment. The formation of the All People's Alliance demonstrates that the pro-democracy movement is not dead in Burma. Unfortunately, its actions - or lack thereof - show us the activists are still frightened and justifiably cautious. Still, the information they have provided about the regime's ongoing abuses are invaluable, and demonstrates their conviction in and of itself. Renewed access to internet may allow them to communicate more easily, but Big Brother will certainly be watching too. End Comment.

STOLTZ